

ALLEGED INCREASING PREVALENCE OF INSANITY
IN IRELAND.

SPECIAL REPORT

FROM THE

INSPECTORS OF LUNATICS

TO

THE CHIEF SECRETARY.

1894.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.



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OFFICE OF LUNATIC ASYLUMS, DUBLIN CASTLE,

27th February, 1894.

SIR,

Pursuant to your instructions we have now the honor to submit to you a brief statement of the conclusions at which the best sources of information which have been open to us have enabled us to arrive with respect to the vexed and difficult question of the alleged increasing prevalence of insanity in Ireland.

As the first step in the execution of our task, we deemed it advisable to obtain the views entertained on this subject by the Resident Medical Superintendents in charge of the several District Asylums, and with this object we, on the 7th December last, addressed to each of them a circular letter of which the following is a copy :—

“CIRCULAR.

“Lunacy Office, Dublin Castle,

“7th December, 1893.

“SIR,—We have been called upon by the Executive for a special report upon the alleged increasing prevalence of insanity in Ireland, and to enable us to comply with this request, we will feel much obliged by your being good enough to furnish us with the fullest information in your power, on this important subject, so far as it relates to your district.

“We are aware that the materials do not, perhaps, at present everywhere exist for supplying, in connection with the question, a thoroughly satisfactory statement of the extent, the distribution, and the increase or decrease of prevailing insanity; but we hope that, with your local knowledge, and the facilities you possess for collecting the material facts bearing on the subject, you may be in a position to submit such a report with respect to it as will meet, in a large measure at least, the object contemplated by the Government in asking for this information.

“While desiring that you should exercise in this matter a perfectly unfettered discretion in affording any information you consider calculated to aid in the solution of the question at issue which your experience may suggest, we are anxious that special attention should be given in your report to the following points, viz. :—

“I.—INCREASE of the rate of insanity in your district, as indicated by the Asylum records, during the ten years ending 31st December, 1892, shown by the admissions, discharges, and deaths for each year, the number resident on the 31st of December for each year, and the average number resident.

“II.—We need hardly point out that the only proper test of the increase of insanity is the proportion of first attacks to the population during the period under review.

“It will therefore be most necessary to give :—

“(a) An accurate return of FIRST ADMISSIONS, and the duration of mental disease on admission of such cases.

“(b.) A return of transfers, re-admissions, and congenital idiots.

“(c.) A return of workhouse cases, distinguishing first admissions, and giving where possible the duration of mental disease on admission.

“III.—PROPORTIONAL AGE distribution of the inmates of the District Asylum under your charge on the 31st December, 1887, and the 31st December, 1892, respectively.

“Proportion per 1,000 at all ages, viz. :—

AGE.	31st December, 1887.			31st December, 1892.		
	Persons.	Males.	Females.	Persons.	Males.	Females.
0-15,						
15-25,						
25-45,						
45-65,						
65 and upwards,						

"IV.—Number of deaths and average MORTALITY of the Insane in your Asylum during the ten years ending the 31st December, 1893.

"V.—A Table is desired of the CAUSES of insanity in patients admitted during the same period.

"It will be advisable in the compilation of this Table that you should follow as closely as possible the headings adopted in Table XVII. of the Statistical Tables, and in this connexion, any special remarks as to the causation of insanity in your district that your information and experience may suggest, will be very valuable.

"In immediate connection with the question of causation by HEREDITY, it is to be observed that it has been very strongly contended that a distinct increase under this head is traceable to the improved and more successful system of Asylum treatment of recent years, and that it therefore becomes a matter of the utmost importance that you should, in your report, throw on these points such additional light as may be suggested by any specific facts that have come to your knowledge—such as the admission of patients descended from former inmates of the Asylum who had been discharged recovered.

"A further point of interest and importance in connection with the question of causation is that relating to the influence exercised in this respect, either by the abuse of ALCOHOL, or any recent changes that have taken place in the habits or DIETARY of the people—and any observations which you may be in a position to offer with respect to this we shall be very glad to receive.

"VI.—EMIGRATION having been represented to be, in its indirect effects, largely accountable for the increased number of admissions to the Asylums in recent years, it becomes very important to ascertain, with precision, how the actual facts stand as to this; and you will probably be able, without much difficulty, to say how far, in the case of your district, the removal in this way of the wage-earning members of families has been followed by the transfer to the Asylum of mentally affected persons previously maintained in their own homes.

"VII.—As it is the wish of the Government that the information called for by them in this matter should be in their hands before the commencement of the Parliamentary Session of 1894, it is particularly requested that your report may be forwarded so as to reach this office on or before the 30th instant at the latest."

"We are, Sir,

"Your obedient servants,

"GEORGE PLUNKETT O'FARRELL,

"E. MAZIERE COURTENAY,

"Inspectors of Lunatics and Commissioners
of Control.

"To Resident Medical Superintendent,
"District Asylum."

In reply to this communication, we have since been favoured by these experienced Public Officers with special reports of a more or less elaborate character, the main drift and substance of which, we think, may be, for present purposes, sufficiently indicated by the following short summary of the principal points dealt with in each, viz:—

(1.) ARMAGH DISTRICT.—(County of Armagh).

In this district there is stated to be an undoubted increase in the number of the insane under treatment, as well as a greater tendency to insanity, the increase being thus shown to be a real and not merely an apparent one. In support of this view, reference is made to the pregnant fact that during the first half of the last decade the number of first admissions was only 339; while during the second half it rose to 421, giving an increase in the five years of 82, or an annual increase of about seven during the whole decade. On the question of causation, the prime factor is pronounced to be the agricultural depression experienced in the district for some years past, with its consequential effects of want of nutritious food, increased vexation and worry, and gradual derangement of physical and mental functions. In support of this assertion, reference is made to the fact that of the admissions during the last ten years, 349 belonged to the farming and labouring classes, while only 17 were artisans, and 11 shopkeepers. Other sources of causation are indicated in connection with emigration, and the consequent withdrawal of the main support of family life and comfort, heredity, alcoholism, and dietary. Under this last head special prominence is given to the widely injurious and undoubted influence of

Indian tea of inferior quality, now largely used throughout the country, and which is commonly not infused but stewed, thus causing a peculiar form of dyspepsia, which in its turn leads to a general debility of the nervous system.

(2) BALLINABLOE DISTRICT—(Counties of Galway and Roscommon).

For the increase of insanity in this district there are stated to be many contributory causes on which it is found difficult to throw much light. Heredity constitutes a large and undoubted element in the question, but the precise extent to which it operates cannot be satisfactorily determined owing to the fact that large numbers of patients are received from remote parts of Galway and Roscommon as to whose previous history it is impossible to obtain reliable information. Alcoholism, though commonly credited with being a fruitful cause of insanity, has not been found in this district to have so operated, very few of the admissions being directly traceable to this.

Indirectly, however, it has had the effect of increasing the asylum population owing to the fact of the offspring of inebriates being liable to so many neurotic diseases.

Diet, it is considered, has unquestionably contributed a great deal to the insanity of the district which supplies the population of this asylum, a large majority of the patients from the remote parts of it showing unmistakable evidence of scant and improper food, also want of vitality and brain power—the insanity of mal-nutrition.

Emigration, it is represented, has exercised a two-fold influence in this district in swelling the asylum numbers, viz :—1. By removing the strong and active members of the family, leaving the weakly in mind and body, and 2, by the number of emigrants who return to this country with minds shattered by climate and overstrain, to end their days in the district asylum.

(3.) BELFAST DISTRICT—(County Antrim).

In this district it is shown by a tabular statement that during the decade 1883-92, the number of asylum inmates has risen by a steadily progressive annual increase from 509 to 678, this being equivalent to a total increase of 169, and an average annual increase of 187 for the ten years, and the number of *first* admissions has increased from 132 in 1883, to 161 in 1892. Within the same period there was, however, a material increase in the population of the portion of the district included in the City of Belfast, and especially in those classes of it from whom the asylum population is mainly recruited, viz :—The factory, artisan, and labouring classes.

As regards the question of causation, the contributory influences are classified in a carefully prepared Table under a great variety of heads, but of these four are dwelt on in detail as deserving of special consideration, viz :—heredity, alcohol, dietary, and emigration. To heredity is ascribed a potent contributory influence in this district, the asylum returns showing that 14½ per cent. of the admissions are directly caused by it, a proportion which would be found considerably below the mark, if it were to be further considered as a cause *predisposing* to insanity. In this connection special reference is made to the alleged effect of asylum treatment in propagating mental disease amongst the offspring of former patients, and, as a result of careful investigation, the Medical Superintendent states as to this :—

“ I have traced directly 186 cases to parentage of asylum inmates, and indirectly “ have had information respecting seventy of such cases.”

It is stated that 11½ per cent. of the admissions to this asylum are directly caused by alcoholic excess, while a large number in addition are, it is observed, apparently to be referred to insufficient, or unsuitable dietary, especially amongst factory workers. Under this head special prominence is here, as in other reports, given to the excessive consumption of tea; not the ordinary infusion, but a decoction of it, now so common amongst the working classes.

(4.) CARLOW DISTRICT—(Counties Carlow and Kildare).

In this district the leading causes assigned for the increase of insanity are the excessive use of alcohol and tobacco, and a general change of dietary from oatmeal porridge, potatoes, and milk to bread and tea, the latter being prepared in the shape of a concen-

trated decoction instead of a short infusion. A case is cited in support of this position in which severe mental strain accompanied by continued subsistence on this form of diet was followed by epileptic seizures, and consequent mania, which, with the rest and nutritious food supplied in the asylum, quite passed away, and has not since recurred.

(5.) CASTLEBAR DISTRICT—(County Mayo).

Though difficulty is here, as elsewhere, experienced in obtaining definite information on the point, no doubt is entertained that in this district family taint is a large factor in the production of insanity, as numerous degrees of relationship exist amongst the patients. The use of alcohol of a particular description has also been found in many cases to prove a more or less exciting cause of sudden maniacal excitement. The change of dietary from porridge and potatoes to bread and tea is also considered to have played an important part in this matter, and among the female inmates especially many cases of insanity are regarded as being attributable to the frequent consumption of a decoction of tea. Emigration in its indirect effects is also regarded as having proved a further contributory cause, in addition to which are noted, as operating in the same direction, the effects springing from the present social state of the community, and the many domestic reverses it has entailed.

(6.) CLOMEL DISTRICT—(County Tipperary).

In this district the average asylum population has risen by a progressive annual increase from 435 in 1883, to 600 in 1892, and within the same period the number of *first admissions* has increased from 86 in 1883, to 101 in 1892. The report is accompanied by most carefully prepared and interesting Tables, which afford much valuable information on the several points involved in the present inquiry, and from which it appears that in this district by far the greater number of the cases of insanity are traceable to heredity. In connection with this circumstance special attention is drawn in the report to the existence in this district of certain clans and factions, popularly known as "three year olds" and "four year olds," who in social arrangements keep much to themselves, owing to which marriages of consanguinity are here of exceptionally frequent occurrence.

Next to heredity, the abuse of alcohol is stated to be the most potent factor of causation; this being in large measure attributed to the adulterated character of the drink supplied in the lower class of public houses. Though no specific facts bearing on the point have come under attention, in this case, it is strongly suspected that the extensive use of tea does play a part in the causation of mental disease. No case is known of any patient having been sent to the asylum owing to the emigration of the wage-earning members of the family, but it is regarded as being a natural inference, that a process which has tended to drain the country of its bone and sinew, must have had an effect in degenerating the race amongst the classes affected by it.

(7.) CORK DISTRICT—(County of Cork).

In this district it is stated to be apparent that, if the number of *first admissions* be taken as the main test of the progress of insanity, there has been no increase during the last ten years. The average number of first admissions has been 213 during the decade, while the number for 1883—the first year of the series—was 211, and for 1892 only 203. The re-admissions were below the average for the first four years of the decade, and above it for 1888, 1889, 1892. The total number of the insane under treatment in the asylum has increased from 1 in 520 in 1883, to 1 in 401 in 1892, or—adding the inmates of the workhouses of the county—from 1 in 385 to 1 in 271. Regret is expressed that the information available as to the causation of insanity is unreliable owing to the imperfect and inaccurate information supplied on the committals. No doubt is, however, entertained that both the abuse of alcohol and heredity should hold a much more prominent place than that assigned to them in this connection. Though difficult of proof, a very strong opinion is entertained that the free discharge of weak-minded but harmless patients, and the too early removal of those recovering, has tended to increase considerably the number of insane who break down from heredity.

(8.) DOWNPATRICK DISTRICT—(County of Down).

In the case of this district the personal experience of the Superintendent has only extended over a few months. Though the average number resident in the asylum for the ten years 1883 to 1892 progressively increased, the number of first admissions gradually decreased. As regards the question of causation, strictly accurate information is not available. Heredity and intemperance are, however, the chief factors, and no doubt is entertained that many cases classed as "unknown," &c., are in fact attributable to the same sources.

(9.) ENNIS DISTRICT—(County of Clare).

There has been a steady increase in the asylum population during the past decade, owing, it is considered, to the fact that many who were formerly at large, or resided with their friends, are now sent to the asylum, the old prejudice against which has largely disappeared. As regards causation, the chief factors are heredity and marriages of consanguinity, and the excessive use of alcohol of an inferior description. The disturbed state of the country, and the circumstances resulting from this, have likewise, it is considered, proved in many instances a cause of mental derangement.

(10.) ENNISCORTHY DISTRICT—(County of Wexford).

Though the population of the County Wexford during the period 1881 to 1891 decreased by 12,000, or 9½ per cent, there has been during the same period an opposite result experienced in regard to that of the district asylum. In 1881 the daily average number of the insane in the asylum was 302, which, with a population of 123,854, gives a proportion of 1 in every 410 persons insane. In 1891 the daily average was 385 with a population of 111,778, giving a proportion of 1 in every 290 persons insane. The first admissions during the decade ending 1882 were 512, and in that ending 1892 they were 554, thus giving a percentage increase of 8½ in the case of this class. The chief explanation of the continuous increase which has been experienced in the asylum population is the accumulation resulting from the preponderance each year of the admissions over the discharges and deaths combined, in addition to which is noted the fact that the old prejudice against sending patients to the asylum is dying out on the part of their friends. In regard to the causation of insanity in this district, the first place is given to heredity, which is an assignable factor in a progressively increasing number of cases, and next to this is placed that of alcoholic abuse. As regards the question of dietary, the more liberal use of tea is referred to as tending to the development of neurotic disease, and so predisposing to some extent to insanity. Emigration is not considered to have contributed to any appreciable extent to swelling in this district the asylum population, the increase in which is largely due to the transfer to the asylum of workhouse patients, amongst whom chronic cases have been found to preponderate to an enormous extent.

(11.) KILKENNY DISTRICT—(County of Kilkenny).

In this district the only point specially dwelt on as likely to have influenced the number of the insane treated in the asylum, is that of marriages of consanguinity. In the southern part of the district, it is stated that a very large number of relatives intermarry, and it is observed that there are more admissions from that than from the northern section of the district.

(12.) KILLARNEY DISTRICT—(County of Kerry).

In this district since the asylum was established in 1832, there has been a steady increase observable in the number of first admissions during each of the decennial periods. This increase has been considerably greater during the ten years ended 1892, than during any of the previous decennial periods, more especially when considered as per 1,000 of the diminished population—the first admissions for the ten years ended 1892 being 826, as against 538 for the similar period ended 1882.

Under the head of causation of insanity, the first place is assigned to heredity, and in this connection it has been ascertained by careful inquiry that, especially in the mountainous parts of the country, marriages between relatives are of frequent occurrence.

The dietary of the peasantry is poor as a rule; dry bread and tea being chiefly used with little milk, and still less meat.

Tobacco is used in excess, and before meals, and in late years a habit has grown up of chewing in addition to smoking it.

Alcoholic abuse is frequently found to be the exciting cause of mania, and cases have been met with of the children of inebriates being insane and epileptic; however, with the general habits of the peasantry this is not assigned as a very prominent source of causation in this district.

The abnormal increase experienced in first admissions is, it is considered, to be in a large measure attributable to the severe mental strain and anxiety the people of the district have suffered during the last ten or twelve years, owing to financial and social difficulties and derangements.

Emigration has not led to any direct increase in the asylum population owing to the loss of the wage-earning members of families; but an appreciable element has been supplied by returned emigrants, and all the cases attributable to sunstroke have occurred amongst patients who had spent some time in other countries and during their stay there.

(13.) LETTERKENNY DISTRICT—(County of Donegal).

In this case special trouble has been taken in the collection and arrangement of much valuable and interesting information derived from the most reliable local sources. The Tables accompanying the report show that both the average admission rate, and the average number resident in the asylum each year have risen; also that the average rate of first admissions has been slowly but steadily increasing, especially during the last three years.

The asylum population increased by 75 persons from the 1st January, 1882, to the 31st December, 1891, and the Census Returns quoted in the report show that while in 1881, out of a population of 206,035, the number returned as of unsound mind was 570, there were found to be in 1891 as many as 690 of this class in a reduced population of 185,555.

Under the head of causation, the first place is assigned in this district to heredity. Much difficulty is experienced, it is stated, in obtaining accurate information on the point, but as the result of close personal observation, and minute local inquiry, the Medical Superintendent has arrived at the conclusion that in 70 per cent. of the cases admitted to the asylum this is the chief predisposing cause of insanity.

Evidence is quoted in this connection tending to establish that where a hereditary taint already exists consanguineous inter-marriages have proved a fruitful source in the dissemination of mental disease in this district, but on the other hand, where the stock is mentally and physically sound, it is believed that such inter-marrying has exercised little or no influence in the propagation of insanity. In support of this view a very striking and interesting case in point is quoted, viz:—that of Tory Island, off the Donegal coast. It is nine miles distant from the mainland, with a population of 348 souls, amongst whom the marriage of relations is a thing of absolute necessity; yet in the course of forty years only one case of lunacy has occurred there, and there are stated to be no imbeciles, epileptics, or idiots amongst the islanders.

Alcoholic abuse is not considered to have proved more than a very small factor in the causation of insanity here, but the enormous and rapidly increasing use throughout the district of tea, not infused, but stewed, has given rise to a severe form of chronic dyspepsia of an incurable and painful form, the result of which is that the general health of the people is deteriorating more than is generally supposed.

Though no positive proof is forthcoming on the point, little doubt is entertained that the excessive use of tobacco, both by smoking and chewing, must also be regarded as a more or less important factor in the causation of mental disease in the district, and the same observation applies to the indirect consequences of the loss through emigration of the best and healthiest members of the community.

Amongst the remaining sources of causation noted as being operative in this remote and interesting region in the spread of insanity, are the poverty of the inhabitants and their adverse circumstances, with the attendant worry and anxiety from which they have suffered in recent times.

Some other possible sources of mental disease are glanced at in the report, but those which have been quoted may be regarded as constituting the principal factors in the problem under consideration.

(14.) LIMERICK DISTRICT—(County of Limerick).

In this district the increased prevalence of insanity has been real as well as apparent. In the causation of the disease, hereditary influence is regarded as the principal factor predisposing to insanity. Intemperance is stated to be assigned as the cause in 10 per cent. of the admissions, and no doubt is entertained that the abuse of alcohol swells the asylum population but not so much from the rural districts as in the large towns and cities. Masturbation has proved here, it is stated, a fruitful source of insanity, many cases attributable to this having been admitted to the asylum within the past four years, and emigration has been found to furnish, in its consequential results, another important factor.

On hearing on the question of the apparent increase of insanity, reference is made to the fact that asylums are now much more in favour than formerly with the people, and that in addition to this, numerous idiots and harmless lunatics, who were in past times allowed to be at large, are now domiciled in the district asylums and workhouses.

(15.) LONDONDERRY DISTRICT—(County of Londonderry).

In this district the causes of the increase of insanity are stated to be intemperance in drink, hereditary influences, inter-marriage of those with insane tendencies, abuse of tea drinking, especially in cases of persons employed in sedentary occupations, and lastly other drinking, which was found some time since to be an undoubted exciting cause, but it is now believed to have much reduced. Returned emigrants, of whom there are now four in the asylum, are referred to as a factor in the increase, but it does not appear that emigration has otherwise operated in this district.

It is observed that there has been a great change in the dietary of the people, to tea and bread from porridge and milk.

It is further stated that the general type of insanity has undergone a change; the patients recently admitted being more of the melancholic class, and their bodily health enfeebled.

(16.) MARYBOROUGH DISTRICT—(King's and Queen's Counties).

In connection with the causation of the increase in the number of the insane in this district, the principal factors referred to are heredity, change of dietary, and the general substitution of bread and tea for porridge and milk; the tea used being simply a decoction of tannin, and the usual mode of making it being to put a quantity of tea in the teapot, early in the morning, water being added as required, and left to infuse at the fire all day.

Intemperance is believed to be one of the principal causes of insanity, owing to the adulterated character of the liquor, and to its being taken in large quantities by persons sustained on a dietary which is deficient in nutrition.

Emigration has also, it is stated, played its part in necessitating the removal of harmless cases, for whom provision can no longer be made in their own homes, to the asylum, the population of which is continually swelled by the accumulation of cases of patients for whom no hope of recovery exists.

The last contributory cause referred to here is the excessive use of tobacco amongst the young.

(17.) MONAGHAN DISTRICT—(Counties of Monaghan and Cavan).

The recorded increase in the number of the insane in this district is considered to be mainly attributable to the fact that asylum treatment is now availed of to a far greater extent than formerly, owing to the improved system of treatment.

The abuse of alcohol is supposed to be accountable for about 1-15th of the asylum admissions, and the excessive use of tea is deemed to have had a considerable share in the causation of insanity in the district.

(18.) MULLINGAR DISTRICT.—(Counties of Meath, Westmeath, and Longford).

In this district there has been an annual increase in the number of the patients under treatment in the asylum, but no material increase is observable in the cases of first admissions. In view of the fact, however, that the population of the district has diminished within the decade, this would indicate a slight actual increase in the number of the insane in the existing population. The increase to be noted in the asylum population appears to be chiefly attributable to accumulation—that is, to the fact that the discharges and deaths have fallen below the admissions (including the re-admissions and transfers).

An intemperate use of alcoholic liquors has not been a marked feature in the history of the admissions to this asylum during the past ten years, but an inordinate consumption of indifferently prepared tea appears to have been introduced largely into the ordinary diet of the patients coming under treatment.

Reliable statistics as to the effects of emigration as a source of causation have not been available, but it is noted as a striking fact that of the male patients at present under treatment 18 per cent. have been abroad. A few of these served as soldiers in India, but the majority have returned from America after various periods of residence there.

(19.) OMAGH DISTRICT.—(Counties of Tyrone and Fermanagh).

The asylum records of this district indicate a steady increase in the number of the insane during the past decade, amounting to 53 in the average number resident in 1893, as compared with 1883, viz. :—573 in the former, as against 520 in the latter.

Though the population of the two counties included in the district fell from 286,698 in 1881 to 245,571 in 1891, the number of first admissions to the asylum rose from 995 during the decennial period commencing with the 1st January, 1873, to 1,146 during the decade ending 31st December, 1892—that is, an increase of 151 during the past ten years, or, taking the population as given in 1891, an increase of first admissions of 12 in every 10,000 of the population.

As regards causation, a large percentage of the cases are referred to hereditary influence. The abuse of alcohol is stated to have exercised a further very great contributory influence, and ether drinking has been credited with having also operated in the same direction. As in other districts, the substitution of tea and bread for a more healthy and nutritious form of diet, and emigration in its indirect consequences, are here also noted as having proved more or less active agencies in the extension of mental disease.

(20.) RICHMOND DISTRICT.—(Counties of Dublin, Wicklow, and Louth).

In this district much difficulty, it is stated, has been experienced in framing the tabular statements accompanying the report, owing to the imperfect state of the asylum records, notably those belonging to the years 1884-85. A further difficulty arose from the fact that in many of the years it was the custom to distribute cases according to predisposing and exciting causes—thus making one case figure under two or more heads.

The actual increase in the number of persons of unsound mind under treatment in this asylum during the last ten years has been remarkable—rising from 1,055 at the end of 1883 to 1467, or 412 more, at the end of 1892. At the same time, as the result of much consideration, it is not thought that the facts warrant the conclusion that there has been during the period, any very marked increase in the tendency to insanity amongst the inhabitants of the district.

The facts suggested as largely accounting for the increase are :—

- (1.) The prejudice against sending patients to an asylum, originally very strong, is dying out.
- (2.) People are becoming less tolerant of having persons of unsound mind in their midst—hence the relations of patients, who would at one time have retained them, now send them to the asylum.

(3.) Poor Law Authorities are becoming more sensible of the unsuitability of work-houses for the insane, and not only send them in yearly increasing numbers to the asylum, but refuse now to receive cases formerly taken by them in large numbers from the asylum.

(4.) The increase is almost wholly confined to the urban population of the City and County of Dublin, the population of which division of the district is increasing.

The Metropolitan District includes naturally a large floating element—waifs and strays of all kinds contribute to swell this drift population—a class peculiarly liable to suffer from disappointment, destitution, and reckless living; factors that are largely contributory to the production of insanity.

(5.) The death rate in this asylum declined remarkably a few years ago, and remained for some time below its former level.

In spite of certain very unfavourable conditions, it is considered that this declension was probably owing to the more successful asylum treatment of recent years, and it accounts for a considerable accumulation of patients.

(6.) During the same period was experienced, probably owing to local conditions—such as over-crowding—a marked falling off in the recovery rate; a further factor in accounting for the accumulation of patients.

(7.) Lastly, it is noted as a further explanation of the increase, that the class of cases admitted in recent times are not of as favourable or hopeful a character as formerly.

Acute mania—the most curable of forms—has become comparatively rare, while melancholia is increasing in frequency, and also primary mental deterioration. Organic brain disease, general paralysis, &c., are also considered to be undoubtedly becoming more common than they formerly were.

The question of heredity as a source of causation, is discussed with much force and intelligence in the report, but no sufficient body of specific facts is, it is stated, available to throw light on the point as to whether the improved treatment of the insane may not indirectly tend to perpetuate, or at least increase the prevalence of insanity.

With respect to causation through alcoholic excess, the conclusion arrived at is that though there are many cases in which insanity is traceable either directly or indirectly to drink, it is not at the present time in this district an increasing cause of it, but distinctly the reverse.

(21.) SLIGO DISTRICT—(Counties of Sligo and Leitrim).

As regards the causation of insanity in this district, it is stated that if the truth could be got at, heredity would be found to operate in a much larger number of cases than appears by the returns to be the case. It is considered that alcoholic indulgence is credited with being the direct cause of insanity to an extent out of all proportion to its merits. No doubt it does excite to insanity in those already predisposed to it, but it is more frequently a symptom than a cause of insanity. Tea is also similarly credited, but it is considered that it can only, like alcohol, affect people indirectly. Emigration has not influenced the transfers to asylums in recent times; the old prejudice against them having died out, the people now are only too ready to send their relatives to them, emigration, or no emigration.

(22.) WATERFORD DISTRICT—(County of Waterford).

In this district a most carefully prepared and exhaustive report has been submitted by the Medical Superintendent.

The asylum population has undergone a considerable increase during the last decade notwithstanding the fact that the population of the district from which it is supplied, has within the same period materially diminished. On the 31st December, 1892, the asylum contained in all 286 insane patients, this being equivalent to 2·53 per 1,000 of the then population of 112,768.

During the succeeding decade (1882–1892), the asylum population increased by 87, there being on the 31st December, 1892, 383 persons under care: which, on the reduced population of that date (98,251), gave 3·89 insane for every 1,000 of the inhabitants.

This increase, which is obviously one of a rather substantial character, is accounted for as follows:—

- (1) The increase in the asylum population during the last decade is most largely due to accumulation—that is, the excess of admissions over deaths and discharges.
- (2) There has been a small but irregular increase in the number of *first* admissions during the same period.
- (3) Hereditary degenerative tendencies play an important part in the causation of insanity, and the marriage of near kin, affected by the same environments, is not without its influence in the production of transmitted degeneration.
- (4) From 25 to 35 per cent. of the cases are directly due to alcoholism.
- (5) Emigration—by the removal of the fittest, and the depressing influence of this removal on the mental organisation of those who remain is, in some measure, responsible for the production of insanity.

This concludes the summarised sketch it was considered necessary to submit of the information supplied to us, in compliance with our request, by the respective Medical Superintendents of the several District Asylums throughout the entire country; and it now becomes our duty to present to you, as succinctly as the circumstances will permit, the general conclusions on the same subject to which we have been ourselves conducted as the result of our personal experience in the matter, and of the most anxious and careful consideration it has been in our power to bestow on all the known and ascertained facts of the situation.

We herewith submit certain Tables with reference to the increase of insanity, which we trust will prove of interest, and we have in preparation further figures bearing on the question of CAUSATION in this country, which we purpose tabulating and publishing in our forthcoming annual report. It must however, be borne in mind that these statistics deal only with a part of the insane classes shown by the last Census to exist in Ireland, and that no complete and reliable returns are available concerning the large unregistered classes. In workhouses the gross total of the accumulation of insanity is shown from year to year, but no means exist of ascertaining the admissions, the discharges, or deaths. Even there the gross totals are open to some doubt, owing to the fact that the persons classed as of unsound mind have not been legally certified as such, and it may therefore so happen that cases may be included in the returns as being at one time insane, who are at another time excluded from this category.

As regards the insane who wander at large, or are under private care in the houses of their relatives or friends, no returns whatsoever exist, except those obtained decennially from the Census Reports.

The following statement, taken from the General Report, Part II, of the Census Commissioners shows the number of lunatics and idiots in 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, and 1891 at large, in asylums, in prisons, and in workhouses as returned in the Census Forms:—

YEARS.	LOCATIONS.					INSTANCES.					Total Lunatics and Idiots.
	At Large.	In Asylums.	In Prisons.	In Work-houses.	Total.	At Large.	In Asylums.	In Prisons.	In Work-houses.	Total.	
1851. . . .	1,073	2,394	213	484	4,164	3,869	203	15	1,129	5,216	9,389
1861. . . .	1,602	4,253	273	527	6,655	5,673	699	31	594	7,097	14,026
1871. . . .	1,243	7,741	5	1,374	9,763	5,347	416	9	1,193	6,765	16,528
1881. . . .	943	7,267	-	1,284	9,494	4,465	1,586	-	2,125	6,036	15,443
1891. . . .	893	11,553	-	2,737	15,183	4,077	980	-	3,159	8,216	23,139

Under the provisions of the Lunacy Laws of England and Scotland the Lunacy Commissioners of these countries receive not only periodical returns from the clerk of every asylum, relating to the inmates of such asylum, whether pauper or private, but also returns from the clerk of each Board of Guardians, containing a complete list of all lunatics chargeable to the Union on the 1st January in each year. This last mentioned

annual return, the form of which is scheduled in the English Act, sets out the name, sex, and age of each lunatic chargeable to the Union; whether maintained in a county or borough asylum, or in a registered hospital or licensed house, or in the workhouse, or in lodgings, or boarded out, or residing with relatives. A quarterly return is also made out of lunatic paupers not in an asylum, stating whether lunatic or idiot, with a return of the bodily or mental health; if mechanically restrained, and by what means, and also length of time supposed to be insane. It may be presumed that it is mainly from these annual returns that the Commissioners compile their report on the insane population of England and Wales. No such returns are available in Ireland, nor have we any power of obtaining information about the insane in workhouses, wandering at large, or under private care, except through the courtesy of the Poor Law Authorities, or from information voluntarily supplied by the Royal Irish Constabulary. We desire to emphasise this point, because undoubtedly a considerable proportion of first admissions to Lunatic Asylums is derived from the reserve of unregistered cases of insanity existing in the country.

It is admitted that the number of first attacks affords the only reliable basis of accurately calculating the amount of freshly occurring insanity—hence it becomes important to ascertain among fresh admissions, over a series of years, the duration of the mental disease previous to admission, so as to determine with precision the proportion of first attacks to the general population.

Our researches thus far only enable us to state that the increase in the number of first admissions has proceeded *pari passu* with the total admissions into district asylums. This is illustrated in diagram A annexed, while the diagram B shows the proportion of the insane of all classes has increased from 150 in every 100,000 in 1851 to 450 in 1891. This enormous increase in the total number of the insane, 200 per cent in a period of forty years, would be most alarming, were we not aware that a very similar increase has taken place in other countries, and that even in England, where the statistics at command are so much more perfect, reliable, and comprehensive than in Ireland, it has been stated, notwithstanding the large augmentation in figures, that the means for final judgment on the vexed question of the increase of occurring insanity amongst the population do not exist, and that in the absence of reliable and accurate data, it is impossible to proceed one step in such an inquiry without danger of being led astray.

The following Tables show (1) the total number of patients confined in District Asylums in Ireland on the 31st December of each year, for the twelve years ending the 31st December, 1892, and (2) the admissions and discharges for the same period:—

I.

YEARS.	TOTAL.			ESTIMATED POPULATION, MIDDLE OF YEAR.
	M.	F.	T.	
1890, . . .	4,685	3,982	8,667	5,302,648
1881, . . .	4,860	4,118	8,978	5,145,770
1882, . . .	5,023	4,249	9,271	5,101,018
1883, . . .	5,196	4,346	9,542	5,023,811
1884, . . .	5,323	4,365	9,687	4,974,561
1885, . . .	5,402	4,470	9,872	4,938,588
1886, . . .	5,493	4,584	10,077	4,906,895
1887, . . .	5,734	4,765	10,499	4,857,119
1888, . . .	5,888	4,937	10,825	4,801,812
1889, . . .	6,057	5,143	11,180	4,757,885
1890, . . .	6,194	5,294	11,488	4,717,859
1891, . . .	6,359	5,374	11,733*	4,681,348
1892, . . .	6,601	5,532	12,133	4,638,175

II.

During the Year	Number of Persons admitted into District Asylums.	Number of Persons removed from District Asylums as Recovered, Convalesced, Died, or Discharged.
1880,	2,564	2,189
1881,	2,503	2,191
1882,	2,645	2,346
1883,	2,704	2,433
1884,	2,736	2,591
1885,	2,850	2,665
1886,	2,746	2,541
1887,	2,863	2,441
1888,	2,821	2,495
1889,	2,956	2,599
1890,	3,095	2,787
1891,	3,010	2,765
1892,	3,181	2,781
TOTAL,	36,475	32,824

In dealing with these figures we find that, while the number of admissions have rapidly increased, the number of discharges have not increased in a like ratio, as it was at one time supposed would have been the case under improved treatment.

Again, the mortality in Irish asylums has been so low that it has always largely tended to favor accumulation in these institutions. Practically all the incurable cases in an asylum have to be retained as permanent patients, and so the continuous increase everywhere of asylum populations is the result of the almost universal preponderance each year of the admissions over discharges and deaths combined, as the Table II. illustrates.

It must however be pointed out that this increase of the registered insane has gone on, in the face of a diminishing population, with much greater rapidity, and has reached a higher proportion in Ireland than in either England or Scotland.

Undoubtedly the large emigration which has taken place from this country within the past fifty years of the strong and healthy has led to an increased and undue proportion of the insane and imbecile, as well as of other defective classes among our population, and again the reports from some of the asylums show that the number of admissions of recent years are swelled by the return of emigrants who have broken down mentally either from hereditary tendency, or from their inability from other causes to bear the strain of their new condition and surroundings. Thus, of the present male population of Mullingar District Asylum, as many as 18 per cent. have been abroad, either in India or America.

The facts and statistics we have as yet obtained, and the reports of the different Resident Medical Superintendents throughout Ireland do not justify us in positively stating, with any pretence to scientific accuracy, that conclusive proof exists that any general increase of insanity has taken place in this country. This arises chiefly from the insufficiency of lunacy statistics. The needed information either does not exist, or, when it appears to exist, proves on examination to be imperfect.

Nevertheless, the ever-increasing proportion of the insane, and the steady yearly advance in the number of first admissions, point to the conclusion that some absolute increase of insanity is taking place in certain districts of this country.

We are glad to be able to add our further opinion that such increase will prove to be comparatively small in amount, and that we can see no existing reason to apprehend that it will extend in any advancing proportion.

In our Parliamentary Report for the present year we propose to deal further with this subject, and by that time we hope to have obtained the statistics needed to make the Inquiry a somewhat fuller and more satisfactory one than we are now in a position to do.

The CONCLUSIONS at which—as at present advised—we have been able to arrive may be briefly summarised as follows :—

- (1.) That the great increase of the insane under care is mainly due to ACCUMULATION, and is, so far, an apparent and not a real increase.

We desire to give the first place in the present enumeration of our conclusions to this particular source of causation, viz. :—the yearly growing tendency to a progressive increase of asylum population as the necessary result of simple accumulation, (1) because it is almost everywhere regarded as constituting the prime factor in the case, and (2) because we apprehend that the important influence it exercises is but very imperfectly understood or appreciated by the public generally. The difference experienced in regard to this in hospitals for the insane, as compared with those devoted to the treatment of ordinary disease, is a very broad one, and is so clearly defined in the carefully prepared report of the Medical Superintendent of the Enniscorthy District Asylum that we venture to here submit a short quotation from his observations, which fully embody our own views on the subject. He says :—

"The immediate cause of the continuous increase of the asylum population is of course the preponderance each year of the admissions over discharges and deaths combined. THE CONDITIONS DIFFER FROM THOSE OF ORDINARY HOSPITALS, in which, if a patient does not recover, and fails to improve after a fair period of treatment, he is discharged as incurable. But in an asylum all the incurable have to be kept on as permanent patients, except a few which may be sent to workhouses; so that from the nature of things an asylum population must perforce go on increasing until the admissions are balanced by an equal number of discharges and deaths: a condition of things the occurrence of which is only a remote possibility at present. Were all the other hospitals for the sick conducted on the same principle (unavoidable in the case of asylums), they too would be rapidly overcrowded with occupants, and, like asylums, there would be an ever-recurring necessity of adding to their accommodation by structural additions. This peculiarity connected with asylum economy is one apt to be lost sight of, or at least not to receive the attention which it deserves."

- (2.) That the yearly increase of admissions is drawn in a considerable proportion of the cases from the reserve of UNREGISTERED INSANE existing throughout the country, as shown by the reduction in the number of lunatics and idiots at large given in the Census Returns for 1891, as compared with 1881.
- (3.) That the annual increase in the face of a shrinking population of the number of FIRST ADMISSIONS, including as it does such a large proportion of FIRST ATTACKS, of insanity, almost irresistibly points to SOME increase of occurring insanity in particular districts.
- (4.) That the main factors which contribute to the development of occurring insanity in this country may be classed as :—

(a.) HEREDITY.

We need hardly point out that hereditary influence largely preponderates over all other existing causes of insanity; as stated by Darwin, it is only too certain that insanity, and deteriorated mental powers run in the same families.

- (b.) CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES among those having any tendency to nervous disease.

This is illustrated by the prevalence of insanity in certain secluded valleys in the West and South of Ireland, where inter-marriage is common. On the other hand its absence under like conditions where there is no instability of nervous constitution in the families of either parent is shown by the infrequency of insanity among the population of Tory Island off the coast of Donegal, referred to in the report of the Medical Superintendent of Listerhenny Asylum.

(c) THE INSUFFICIENT DIETARY of the poorer population leading to produce anemia and constitutional weakness, which favour the development of scrofulous and neurotic disease.

(d) THE IMMEDIATE USE OF CERTAIN NERVOUS STIMULANTS, such as alcohol, ether, tea, and tobacco.

ALCOHOL may as is well known act as a direct cause of insanity, but it more frequently transmits an hereditary tendency to the production of nervous disease.

ETHER DRINKING obtains over a very limited area of this country, and so can have played but a small part in the causation of insanity.

While the moderate use of properly prepared Tea is regarded as innocuous, or even beneficial in its action on the nervous system, its ill-effects when decocted or over infused on persons who make it their staple article of dietary are dwelt on by almost all the Resident Medical Superintendents in their several reports. Undoubtedly the method of preparation adopted, and the excessive use of this article of diet, now so general, among our poorer population, tends to the production of dyspepsia, which in its turn leads to states of mental depression highly favourable to the production of various forms of neurotic disturbance. The excessive use of tobacco also, especially among the young, whether by smoking or chewing, in the opinion of certain of our Medical Superintendents, acts, though perhaps in a minor degree, injuriously on the nervous centres.

(e) One further contributory influence in the increase of insanity dwelt on in some of the reports remains to be here specially noticed by us, namely that of the ACUTE AGRICULTURAL DEPRESSION AND DISLOCATION so widely experienced in recent years, and the great mental strain and harassing anxieties that have followed in their wake.

In illustration of the reality of this as a causative element, reference is made in the excellent report furnished by the Medical Superintendent of the Armagh Asylum to the SUGGESTIVE FACT that of patients admitted during the last ten years, as many as 349 belonged to the agricultural population, while only 28 were drawn from the artisan and commercial classes.

CONCLUSION.

The observations we have now submitted complete, we think, all that we are in a position to offer on the present occasion, but, as already intimated, we propose reverting to the subject, and we hope with somewhat fuller information, when we proceed to address to His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant our Statutory Report for the present year.

We have the honour to be, Sir,

Your Obedient Servants,

G. PLUNKETT OFARRELL, M.D.

E. MAZIERE COURTENAY, M.B.

The Right Hon JOHN MORLEY, M.P.,
Chief Secretary for Ireland.

C.

YEAR.	Population.	Number of Insane.	Proportion per 100,000 of the Population.
1851,	5,574,278	9,980	150
1861,	5,798,967	14,068	245
1871,	5,432,377	16,505	305
1881,	5,174,836	18,413	356
1891,	4,704,750	21,188	450

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B

Diagram showing proportion of Lunatics and Idiots at large, in asylums, in prisons, and in workhouses per 100,000 of the population in 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, and 1891.

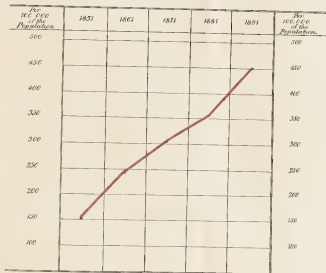


Diagram showing the fluctuations in the total admissions, first admissions, and re-admissions to District Asylums, from 1883 to 1892 inclusive.

